

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0522

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 1706

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OTRA, OVIP, SA, IT

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LEONE VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA

SUMMARY: LEONE VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA WENT OFF FLAWLESSLY FROM THE PROTOCOL STANDPOINT BUT WAS ONLY A MODERATE SUCCESS FROM SUBSTANTIVE ASPECT AS SAUDIS RESISTED SIGNING OF ANY DETAILED AGREEMENTS BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE TIME FOR PREPARATION. ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED WHICH CALLS FOR THE CREATION OF A JOINT COMMISSION CHAIRED ON BOTH SIDES AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE THERE WERE NO OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS AND ITALIANS SOUGHT TO KEEP AGREED PRESS STATEMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AS BLAND AS POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

1. ON MARCH 9 ITALIAN EMBASSY COUNSELOR CORDONE PROVIDED A DETAILED RUNDOWN OF THE MARCH 2-5 VISIT OF PRESIDENT LEONE TO SAUDI ARABIA. THE ITALIAN SIDE WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THE ARRANGEMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE AND THE POSITIVE AND FRIENDLY ATTITUDE OF THE SAUDIS. THEY WERE LESS PLEASED WITH THE SUBSTANTIVE OUTCOME OF THE VISIT. CORDONE SAID THAT WHAT THEY GOT, HOWEVER, WAS AS MUCH AS THEY COULD
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EXPECT SINCE THE ITALIAN SIDE CAME ILL PREPARED FOR THE

VISIT.

2. THE ITALIANS SEEMED TO THINK, HE SAID, THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO HAMMER OUT AND SIGN AGREEMENTS COVERING VARIOUS FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC MATTERS IN THE SHORT SPACE OF THE VISIT. THE SAUDIS WERE NOT RESISTANT TO AGREEMENTS IN PRINCIPLE; THEY JUST REFUSED TO BE RUSHED AND COMPLAINED THAT THERE HAD BEEN INADEQUATE PREPARATION. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES A QUITE GENERAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGREEMENT WAS THE BEST THE ITALIANS COULD GET. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO CORDONE, THIS AGREEMENT COULD LEAD TO A NUMBER OF DETAILED AGREEMENTS IN THE NOT-TO-DISTANT FUTURE. HE EXPECTS ITALIAN FOLLOW-UP TO BE HIGH-LEVEL AND AGGRESSIVE.

3. POTENTIALLY THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME OF THE VISIT WAS THE DECISION TO CREATE YET ANOTHER "MIXED COMMITTEE" OR JOINT COMMISSION TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE COOPERATION. A DELEGATION IS DUE OUT FROM ROME WITHIN THE MONTH TO WORK OUT DETAILS. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN AGREED THAT THE COMMISSION WILL BE HEADED ON EACH SIDE BY SOMEONE OF MINISTERIAL RANK. THE ITALIANS HOPE THAT MOHAMMAD ABA AL-KHAYL, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMY, WILL CHAIR THE SAUDI SIDE. (ABA AL-KHAYL WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY DURING LEONE'S VISIT, FIRST IN THE U.S. AND THEN AT THE ALGIERS OPEC MEETING. CORDONE BLAMES PART OF THE ITALIAN NEGOTIATING FAILURE ON FINANCIAL MATTERS ON ABA AL-KHAYL'S ABSENCE WHICH OBLIGED THEM TO DEAL WITH THE VERY CAUTIOUS MINISTER OF FINANCE, THE KING'S UNCLE PRINCE MUSA'ID).

4. THERE WERE NO OUTSTANDING BILATERAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS. THE SAUDIS WANTED A JOINT COMMUNIQUE BUT THE ITALIAN SIDE DEMURRED KNOWING THEY COULD NOT THEN AVOID MENTION OF JERUSALEM. THE COMPROMISE WAS TWO SEPARATE PRESS RELEASES, EACH APPROVED BY THE OTHER SIDE. IN THIS WAY THE ITALIANS WERE ABLE TO TUCK WHATEVER ELSE THEY SAID UNDER THE SKIRTS OF SC RES 242. THEY WERE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF THE FORMULATION THEY WORKED OUT ON THE PALESTINIANS WHICH CALLED FOR "ACCEPTANCE BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY"

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AND COULD BE INTERPRETED ANY NUMBER OF WAYS.

5. WE THINK CORDONE'S ACCOUNT IS PROBABLY QUITE ACCURATE. THE VISIT GOT EXTENSIVE AND FAVORABLE PRESS COVERAGE AND THE POLITICAL CLIMATE APPEARED TO BE EXCELLENT. THE SAUDIS PROBABLY WILL BE RECEPTIVE TO MORE DETAILED AGREEMENTS IN THE FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC AREA IF THE ITALIANS CAN COME UP WITH SOME WELL WORKED OUT PROJECTS.

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